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TO

THE REV. CHRISTOPHER WYVILL,

Burton Hall, Yorkshire.

London, March 14, 1801.

DEAR SIR,

IN your letter of the 11th, you expressed a desire to know the cause of my wish for your presence this spring in London. That explanation leads to a wide field, and I am at present much engaged with private business. It would be extremely gratifying to me were it otherwise; for never had the public more need of the assistance of those who are disposed to devote themselves to its service.

It must now be near twelve months ago, since an excellent person, well known to you, intimated to me an expectation of an early meeting taking place, between certain men of high rank, some of whom do not appear pro-

minent in parliament, together with others in public situations who are decidedly friends to the cause of freedom ; in order to consider if some effectual stand could not be made against the destructive career of ministers. In the circle in which the idea originated, I understood it to have been intended that each of the parties first consulting together, should take to the meeting one person who was not in either House of Parliament, and our friend proposed to me to be the person he should introduce.

It is easy enough, from only a slight knowledge of the world, to account for some delay in a matter of such a nature ; but when great part of a year had elapsed without the meeting taking effect, I wrote to our friend on the subject, and at the time of my writing to you I had not learned his sentiments so fully as I have done since. I lately made him a visit, and found him in a state of chagrin, being absolutely at a loss to guess when any concerted operations, such as we had expected, were now likely to take place. This is discouraging ; but as the thing ought not to be despaired of, such checks only stimulate me the more to exertion. Knowing you, also, to be of the persevering kind, it will afford me satisfaction to
give

give you the outline of what has passed in my mind since the first communication I had on the matter last year ; and I the more readily do it, as it is with a hope of its being a mean of promoting the object I have mentioned.

To you I need not descant on the general state of the nation. It is, in every view of it, truly awful. We are even under circumstances, which, on a superficial view, seem astonishing ; for the only proceeding which can possibly lead to safety is very rarely noticed, and then only so slightly touched upon, as to beget no union, and to produce no effect. Various may be the causes for what seems so unaccountable ; but the principal cause unquestionably is, partial ignorance ; or perhaps it may be better to call it half-thinking. A consciousness of ignorance begets a teachableness of disposition ; but half-thinking is prolific of dangerous error, and is the withering blight of sound knowledge.

As those who persuade themselves that our affairs are yet retrievable, seem to be very few ; while those who must wish them to be retrieved, are of course many ; here is a reason for hoping the many may ere long be more ready than heretofore, to listen to the few. Hence it is, we may account for the symptoms
favourable

favourable to consultation and to union which last year appeared ; a disposition which, from the very nature of the case, we may conclude must continue to exist*. Then, notwithstanding the first blossoms were scattered, yet, as the present season is propitious for maturing reflection, we may daily look for a fresh bloom of this wisdom, and cherish the hope of fruit.

The intelligent have long apprehended, that nothing but severe calamity would ever arouse the nation to a true sense of its situation, or to the necessary efforts for its preservation ; and they have equally seen, that nothing but visible danger to our institutions, would sufficiently awaken men of rank and great possessions, to the necessity of sincerely siding with freedom, and cordially uniting with the lower orders for its preservation.

It is impossible for men of the least observation not to see that an uncommonly ruinous administration has greatly accelerated the calamitous crisis that was foreseen to be approaching, and that the public danger is now sufficiently terrifying, to command the attention of all men not devoid of reflection, and to call
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* Considerable evidence of the existence of this disposition has since appeared.

forth the exertions of every one not wholly destitute of public virtue.

Those, my dear Sir, who have been calumniated and proscribed, because of the constitutional knowledge and principles which unveiled to them the frauds and deceptions of the grand impostor, and preserved them from the infatuation of the times, are those who can now with most composure look the public danger in the face, and who may expect the time is at hand when their counsels may obtain the consideration they merit.

You who have so long and so assiduously laboured to avert, by timely reform, the dreadful evils with which we are now surrounded, will with me, I doubt not, even draw from our present calamitous situation, a sort of consolation, or rather of hope. Sad experience having shewn us that corruption was so deep-rooted, and the higher classes so little acquainted with, if not indisposed to true political liberty, that nothing short of a crisis like the present, and danger to their estates and privileges staring them in the face, could ever call forth an energetic patriotism on their part; we, I say, who had so long anticipated such days, and had made so many exertions to avert
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the danger, cannot but draw some consolation from the present state of things, if it afford us a hope of producing, at last, that political salvation we wished to have secured at periods less alarming.

But, notwithstanding the hopes to be entertained, no intelligent mind can divest itself of painful apprehension, while contemplating the period at which we are arrived ; a period when the loss of constitutional representation has given both our estates and our liberties to the crown ; a period in which, at a ruinous expence, we have pulled down our better fortunes to purchase only the general enmity of Europe ; and a period when the afflicting hand of God is upon the nation, to bring it to a sober use of its reason. At a period such as this, when every mind, impressed with the awful overshadowing gloom, is divining, in anxious suspense, what is to be the particular mode of our destruction, or what may be the extraordinary catastrophe that awaits us, is it not matter of most melancholy consideration—is it not astonishing—and perhaps one of the worst symptoms of our case, that we do not see our old nobility, nor the heads of our ancient families, rallying around the Constitution with the high spirit of their forefathers, and forming a solid

solid and resisting rampart to beat back the farther encroachments of corruption and despotism ; on some dignified plan attracting public attention, inspiring confidence, begetting an enthusiastic unanimity, and successfully arousing the spirit of the nation in defence of its liberties.

Independent of the progressive advances from bad to worse, which must of necessity have gone on, until stopped by the operation of reform, we ought not to be ignorant of the vast change which has already taken place, and is powerfully operating in the field of human intellect throughout Europe, touching the subject of civil government ; and that until governments shall be modelled on the best principles of that science, no permanent tranquillity can any where be expected. And we must also be sensible of an almost total annihilation of confidence in public men of our own country, which (without adverting to particular instances of tergiversation) has been a necessary consequence of that general mode of acting in parliament, which grew out of the corruptions of the institution.

The factious system, and the general public conduct it generated, have in short brought

us into a situation totally new; in which no parliamentary coalition, unless bottomed on the true principles of political liberty, can ever again have any solid or durable support from without.

Considering the relative situations of the King and the Barons in the reign of John, or of the Crown and the Nation in the reign of James II. on neither of those occasions was there a more imperious call upon English patriotism for exertion than at the present moment; especially as there is now no foreign army in the country under circumstances favouring patriotic exertion, as there was on each of those former occasions. Keeping our eye, however, for the present, on the latter of those cases of successful resistance, and comparing it with our own disgraceful apathy, we must see, on the very face of the comparison, that we have either much less virtue and vigour than Englishmen had a century ago, or that the effort to be now made is thought to be greater, and the task more difficult, than it was then.

Arduous enough is the task, God knows! and indeed it is a task of far greater magnitude than should seem to be comprehended by some public men, if we may judge from the nature
of

of their inefficient measures; and yet, if I might be allowed the mode of expression, I should observe, there is more of magnitude than of difficulty in the undertaking. No man, at the same time, is more aware than I am, that it is an Herculean labour we have to perform; no one has more contemplated the length, and breadth, and depth of the despotism we have to encounter, nor the extent of the corrupt system we have to correct. But every system that violates nature, and that shocks the understandings, the morals, the feelings, and the interests of man, is a fabric erected over a mine stored with explosive combustibles; of which human intellect, all the moral principles, and all the generous and noble passions of the soul, more powerful than gunpowder, are ever in readiness, when once touched by the spark of patriotic enthusiasm, to blow it in fragments into the air.

Let not the word *enthusiasm* be condemned. Both the word and the thing are good. You yourself, my dear Sir, are an enthusiast. Without enthusiasm who ever eminently excelled? who ever became illustrious by great achievements? Without this heavenly spark, who ever disinterestedly and perseveringly toiled in the cause of truth, or virtue, or public freedom?

Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is the ardent spirit in the composition of mind, without which it neither resists corruption, nor is inflamed with a genuine love of liberty.

Does not the most phlegmatic General strive to excite the enthusiasm of his army, as the main spring in the execution of his designs? And when the philosophic Statesman, in like manner, aims to crush faction cemented by sordid self-interest, and fortifying itself by corruption, how is he to succeed unless he touch this spring? for thus only will he be enabled to arouse, to organize, and to direct the spirit of the people! Thus, then, enthusiasm is an essential of national resistance to national oppression. But he that would inspire a defeated army, or a dispirited nation, with enthusiasm, must first possess its *confidence*. He must therefore have wisdom, genius, and disinterestedness; he must devote himself to the interests of those under his conduct, and he must be patient of labour in their service; he must feel for them a paternal affection, and sympathize in their feelings and their wishes.

And such precisely must be the character of an association now formed to reanimate the spirit of the People, and to save our tottering State.

It

It is equally evident, that all those members to whom it would belong to take a conspicuous part in such an association, ought to form themselves on this model: but it should, in an eminent degree, be the character of its leader; for an acknowledged leader it doubts ought to have.

After such an association should have agreed upon, and should have defined its object, and have chosen its leader, it would be a proof of its wisdom to express its confidence in that leader, in terms of warmth and energy; because, by a law of nature, it would more effectually identify itself with the people, through the person of its leader, than by any other mode. It would also be right to provide, as much as possible, that every visible movement of such an association, should be in the persons of individuals of the highest characters.

But when grand achievements are to be performed against powers apparently resistless, and the greatest effects are to be wrought by seemingly slender causes, we must look not only to the principles, but to the practicabilities of action. In the case before us, they will probably be found few and simple. I take them to be these, namely:

First,

First, An association to be formed :

Secondly, The press to be employed :

Thirdly, A patriotic use of seats in parliament to be fully adopted : and,

Fourthly, Personal exertions to be encouraged.

First, then, in regard to an association, if there be left in the land any true nobility ; if the once-manly character of an English gentleman be not extinct ; if property retain its pride of independence ; if respectable movers of the measure can be found ; and if liberty and courage have not wholly fled from our shores ; such an association may, and must, soon rise into existence. You now, my dear Sir, know why I wished for your early presence in London. Come, I beseech you, as soon as your patriotic labours in the country will permit ; and commence in the capital other, and perhaps more efficacious, labours in the same cause !

The main object of such an association is next to be considered. In order to excite, to keep alive, and perpetually to augment the public sympathy, that object ought to be made
clear

clear to all understandings, and captivating to all hearts; so that it may be espoused by the people with faith and energy. It should be exhibited in all convenient simplicity; but it should be of such a nature, and so comprehensive, that a reference to it should be a test whereby might be tried the merit or demerit of almost all political measures immediately affecting the *constitution*. Let the object then be, *the recovery of political liberty*; but yet, in order to prevent misapprehensions and misrepresentations, let it be explained, that the political liberty intended, is that which is found under the *English constitution*, when enjoyed in its full extent according to its own principles, of which *representation* is the most prominent and the most vital.

Then, secondly, as political liberty must ever be endangered, in proportion as the press shall be silenced through fear, or polluted by the dissemination of slavish doctrines, so too much care cannot be taken to guard its independence, to preserve its purity, to exalt its reputation, and to employ its energies for the public good.

As juries are recovering from the mania of fraudulent alarm, and as ministers and their crea-

tures are growing more cautious, so the press is gradually recovering from its late degradation. Booksellers dare once more deal in political writings, and, under the patronage of such a society as we are contemplating, there is perhaps no political doctrine fit for men of character to avow, that may not be openly circulated.

PUBLIC OPINION being the Archimedean lever by which despotism can only be overturned, neither pains nor expence ought to be spared in employing the press, for producing an *enlightened public opinion*. Under the fostering patronage of the society, the flood-gates of genius in favour of reform ought to be opened; effectual care, however, at the same time being taken, that nothing get abroad, under the society's sanction, but what should do it honour, increasing the attachment and admiration of the public towards their benefactors.

While projecting a literary warfare against corrupt power, a warfare that cannot be waged but at considerable expence, we need not be startled at the apparent disparity between such a revenue as we may be able to command, and that of the Exchequer. If man be indeed a moral being, then a *thousand*, in the cause of truth
and

and liberty, will go farther than a *million* in the dishonest service of falsehood and slavery; and if the virtue of the times shall give us the society itself, the same virtue will provide the necessary funds.

As the strength and ultimate trust of all usurped and arbitrary power is its mercenary standing army, so the strength and hope of reforming patriotism is a free and vigilant press. The press, therefore, must be kept in activity at no niggard expence. Men with Miltonic pens and a Miltonic devotion to liberty are to be found, who, if treated with delicacy, and enabled to give up their time to the public, would soon write down, in the public estimation, a faction whose relation to *liberty* is the same as is the relation to *property* of thieves and robbers. When wit and humour, satire, argument, and eloquence, all combine to undeceive an abused public; falsehood, fraud, and treason, soon must hide their odious heads.

On the third head of our means, namely, a right use of seats in parliament, I may be concise. We know that what is well said in parliament, is said to the whole nation. He who can thus speak to millions, can do more immediate good than a multitude of writers; and,

until the press be completely restored to freedom and activity, he can do that good, which, by writers, cannot be done at all.

And as the very object of such an association as we are proposing, is to put an entire end to that which is the root of all our political evil, the Borough system, those of the association who shall have Borough patronage and influence, must, of course, hold the whole in readiness, as a sacrifice on the altar of liberty. If, meanwhile, a new election take place before the sacrifice be called for, they will necessarily introduce on the parliamentary theatre none but men perfectly sound in principle, and of ability, either for speaking, for writing, or for counsel; so that not a particle of patriot power be wasted.

On the fourth, and last head, namely, personal exertion, the very creation and appearance of the society, would call into action the sympathetic patriotism of the whole country, now latent, and only venting itself in desponding lamentations or unavailing complaints.—The wrongs and grievances of the people, now rankling at the heart in dumb discontent, would find a tongue; and smothered indignation, speech and action. Hence, in the existence of
such

Such a society, we should probably find a security from the insurrection of misery and despair; as well as a preventive of that military despotism to which such insurrections might but too probably lead.

While speaking of personal exertions, we must not overlook the many apostles of liberty, who, inspired by the example of the society, would every where preach their doctrine of salvation; and doubtless their good tidings of great joy would gain them disciples by thousands, at least amongst the poor and needy, whose characteristic it is to be ready listeners to the words of commiseration and comfort; and, in respect of *political* treasure, who amongst us is not, alas! emphatically, *poor and needy*?

Having thus given you an idea of an association, for which there seems to be at this time an imperious necessity, we may now consider what title it should bear. The following, perhaps, might be unexceptionable, namely:

“The Society for promoting a Parliamentary Reformation, on the true Principles of Representation, for the Recovery of Political Liberty, and the Preservation of the English Constitution.”

On

On this title I shall make four observations :
 1st. *Parliamentary Reformation* being, in a general sense, the *only* means of arriving at our grand object, *political liberty*, the society ought not to set an ill example to the people, by wasting its strength, or bestowing its attention, upon any inferior object, except for the purpose of illustration, since in *political liberty* every political good is included.

2^{dly}. As the democratic branch of parliament is that where the reformation is to be applied, the society ought, in its outset, to satisfy the people, that, in the intended mode of that reformation, no sacrifices to the interests, nor to the prejudices of the aristocracy or the crown, would be thought of; but that it was a sacred rule the society had laid down to itself, faithfully to consult the science of representation, and strictly to adhere to its true principles, as the only specific means of obtaining real political liberty.

If the society would entitle itself to the public confidence, (without which it could do nothing,) this must be its line of conduct. In pretending to reform the application of any other science, whether within the bounds of natural or of moral philosophy, a society which should
 prescribe

prescribe rules of practice, in direct violation of the known principles of the science in question, must, at once, forfeit both its pretensions to knowledge, and its character for integrity.

In England, then, a country which has been under representative government for a thousand years, and which to the rest of the world has been the fountain of political instruction, a society for parliamentary reformation, at a moment so awful as the present, will feel the high demands of its reputation for knowledge, and of its character for integrity, too strongly to be resisted.

3dly. The recovery of *political liberty* being the grand object of the proposed reformation, it would not only be necessary to attend to the *first* principles of the science of representation, but likewise to all *other* principles clearly deducible from the *first*; and also to adhere to such maxims and practical regulations as successful experience had recommended.

But, farther, lessons of prudence should likewise be drawn from *unsuccessful experience*; and when omissions can be discovered, which at any time occasioned the loss of liberty, the securities

securities omitted should, in future, be adopted for its preservation. Utterly to subvert the foundations laid by Alfred, has employed the traitors of England for nearly ten centuries: but, profiting by ruinous experience, and wisely resorting to the simple means to be discovered by consulting nature, and the true principles of the science of civil government, our liberties may, if the earth shall so long endure, have a tenfold duration.

And 4thly. The preservation of the *English constitution*, ought to be added to the recovery of *political liberty*, as an object of the association; not, indeed, from any sense of moral duty owing to the Ministers of the Crown, and to that large proportion of the Peerage, who, by their criminal aggressions on the palladium of our liberties, have subverted and destroyed that constitution; and whose punishment would be just, were it never more to confer on them privileges they have ungratefully employed to undermine the very system by which those privileges were conferred; but that addition ought to be made from motives of an enlarged and generous policy, combined with considerations of humanity, and with a rational hope, that, if once restored, that constitution might be so fortified in future, as, by the very enjoyment
and

and exercise of true political liberty, to afford hereditary privilege its best security.

Having thus, my dear Sir, given you my ideas on such a patriotic institution as I conceive to be adapted to our present situation, it remains only now to offer some general remarks on the subject.

When it was judged to be for the public good, that one of the Stuart race should be recalled to a vacant throne; and when, again, it became necessary to banish his brother; the purse-strings of private men, who were respectively zealous in those causes, were liberally drawn; and even sums of princely magnitude were furnished by private individuals. Was, then, the unconditional restoration at that time, of a Stuart, to be compared to the recovery at this time of our Constitution? Or can the whole catalogue of subordinate objects, almost wholly referring to mere *legal protection*, which are detailed in the Bill of Rights, be put for one moment in competition with *constitutional representation*, which is a convertible term for *political liberty*?

Do we not here see the wretched imbecility, and the puerile bustle about trifles, of the Reformers

formers of 1688; who, instead of securing within the democratic common the tree of political liberty itself, to protect them under its shade, and to shower down upon them, without stint, its delicious nourishment, snatched only, like silly children, at the fruits they had been accustomed to taste; while they left the tree itself exposed to be insidiously taken into the domain of aristocracy, by whose encroaching pale it is at length encompassed, and held as a private property?

If, then, on the two occasions I have noticed, and for such wretched objects as I have instanced, the whole nation was put in motion, and men liberally put down their money, shall not we, whose object is of inconceivably more value, as liberally subscribe? As to the comparative necessity of reform, in 1688 and in 1801, a transient view of the two periods may satisfy us. We may, for instance, compare a debt in 1688 of *half a million*, with a debt in 1801 of more than *five hundred millions*: we may compare a *poor rate* in 1688 of a few hundred thousands, with a poor rate in 1801 of eight or ten millions: we may compare the *taxation* of the two periods: we may compare the *prerogative* of one period with the *influence* of the other; and soldiers' *quarters* with soldiers'

diers' *barracks*: we may compare the *standing armies* of the two periods; as well as the state of the *press*, and of *personal liberty*: we may farther compare the *imprisonments* and *state trials*, and other *terrors* in use, under James the Second; with the *imprisonments* and *state trials*, and *bulks* and *solitary cells*, and the exercise and vindication of *torture*, for which we have been indebted to the Ministers of George the Third: and, finally, we may compare a popular representative, which James the Second *dared not assemble*, with a House of Parliament, which placemen under George the Third (without reprehension or a forfeiture of office) have maintained, *does not, and ought not, to represent the people*. If, then, but for the reformation of 1688, the nation must have sunk into absolute slavery; what, but a reformation more rationally planned, and more completely executed, can now prevent it!

If others, my dear Sir, feel as I do, they must view themselves as slaves in the hands of unprincipled barbarians, and be ready to redeem themselves at any price. Out of what shall annually be left, after the agents of *taxation without representation* shall have done their office, and my own easily-satisfied necessities shall have been

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provided

provided for, every remaining shilling shall be at the command of such an association as I speak of. What noble, or what man of large possessions, to repel French or Russian invaders, would not, during the conflict, readily contribute half his income? Then why not, to drive off invaders, who, by their system of *taxation without representation*, have actually possessed themselves already of *all men's estates, real and personal*, and metamorphosed the rightful proprietors into mere agents of the Exchequer, for delivering up their own property whenever called for by the captain of the band? And the more so, when it is also evident that the system now spoken of, necessarily leads either to a French extinction of nobility, or to a Russian degradation of it.

As so simple a thing, as the right formation of an earthen plate, was never since the Creation discovered till hit upon by a Wedgewood, 'tis no reproach to say, that a system in detail for giving success to such a society as we are considering, may not have occurred to such persons as ought to be conspicuous members of it; but, the legitimate means once pointed out, while the imperious necessity for such an association is seen and felt, we must not permit ourselves to doubt, but that a sufficient number
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amongst those of the highest rank and largest fortunes in the community, will rejoice to adopt the plan, and strenuously exert themselves to give it effect. And when it is remembered that the task to be undertaken, is no less than that of subduing a faction, which has in its hands the whole power, and at its disposal the whole revenue of the state, it is to be presumed that the funds of the society, by the wise and high-minded liberality of its members, will be rendered fully adequate to its occasions.

At a time when, with superficial observers, 'tis a fashion to deny the existence of real patriotism, the dignified and imposing example that would be given, in the formation of such a society, would have an electric effect on the public mind; it would rekindle a patriotic spirit through the country; and beget anew, by its new principles, a confidence in public men. Thus, by a reaction founded in moral causes, the Borough Faction, by carrying corruption to an extreme, and despotism to the length of intolerable oppression, will raise up, I trust, an opposing power, by which it shall shortly be annihilated.

When our Peers possess incomes from twenty
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to fifty and fixty thousand pounds a year, and many of our gentlemen rival the nobility in wealth, how easy it should seem to be, to provide, during the period of exertion in the cause of our liberties, almost any revenue that can be named! To save his country, what man will not abridge his expence? what man will not suspend the gratification of his taste in the fine arts, and, much more, in mere matters of luxurious indulgence, of empty parade, or costly splendour? Will not the man of refined taste, and of a truly elegant imagination, warmly feel, that Italian painting and Grecian sculpture are vapid and empty sources of delight, compared with the exalted virtue of restoring his Country's Liberty! and what lofty-minded man but will revolt at the thought of raising palaces enriched with Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian beauty, wherein he must dwell in melancholy grandeur, deprived of freedom, heavenly emanation! that first gave inspiration to Doric, Ionic and Corinthian genius!

What must pass in the grovelling minds of those serpents of their country, who have crawled and wriggled into the Peerage through borough filth and political servility, 'tis disgusting to think; but if the ancient high-born nobility retain a spark of that honour, a particle of that
English

English spirit, which dictated, sword in hand, the Great Charter, they will disdain to submit to a borough sovereignty, the usurpation of which has, in all political effect, dethroned the king, put down the hereditary great men, and enslaved all.

Come hither, then, respected veteran in the cause of Reform! and exert the influence belonging to experienced wisdom, and long-tried virtue, to awaken sleeping patriotism, to arouse torpid public spirit, to counsel doubting virtue, and to hold up to a wronged, dishonoured, and negligent nobility, the constitutional mirror! In that mirror, let them see that their high dignities and hereditary authority are become vendible commodities:—let them behold how money-dealers from city shops have seated themselves, by purchase, amongst our Fitzroys and our Ruffels, our Percys and our Howards;—and how slaves in soul have, by their very meanesses, made themselves Lords of a once-free Country!

Are these things to be endured? can our ancient nobility, and those who hold the rank of gentlemen among us, witness without emotion the degradation into which they are sinking?
and

and must it not be discerned, that unless, by spirit and fortitude, we avert our fate, we are on the eve of some dire convulsion, of which our nobles and our gentlemen would be the first victims ; or of a horrid despotism, under which they must be the most conspicuous and most pillaged slaves ?

Viewing our situation, then, in all its aspects, I must needs think we are arrived at a crisis, when nought but genuine patriotism can avail us ; where 'tis not in nature for any man, or any society of men, offering themselves as leaders, ever to grow into a resistless column, through the confidence and junction of the people, unless they utterly cast from them every prejudice adverse to the cause of genuine Liberty.

Conscious, as we must be, that *hereditary* power and privileges are not sanctioned by the laws of nature ; and knowing, as we do, that royalty and nobility are in possession of much more than belongs to them ; those orders ought to see the prudence of doing timely justice to the people. All those who wish for the abolition of those privileged orders, must have a complacency in the present aspect of things, and cease to be advocates for a Reformation of Parliament ; and how extensive may be the alienation of mind of that class

class who constitute the physical strength of the community, from a constitution under which they are miserable, I shall rather leave you to judge than venture to suggest. Should we have cause to wonder, if it were to a considerable extent? Be that however as it may, nothing but an equitable and truly patriot conduct on the part of a virtuous phalanx in the Aristocracy (meaning of property as well as of actual peers) affording the lower orders more favourable views of that constitution, and a prospect of enjoying it uncorrupted, can much longer reconcile them to it. As the people, however, are not stocks and stones, it should seem that even on principles of self-interest and common prudence, our intelligent nobility ought not merely to declare themselves consenting to a Parliamentary reformation, but ought to exert themselves to the utmost to obtain it. They ought accordingly to explain to the people its happy effects, and above all to convince them that it would produce political liberty; which is the only security in nature for a redress of grievances, and the only circumstance that can give any one government a decided preference to any other. They ought to court the people's acceptance of reformation by the most winning address; and to seek their confidence and attachment by assiduous attentions and real friend-

friendship. I have some authority for believing their advances would be met more than half-way, and with enthusiasm: but, considering the precipice on which we stand, I dread the effect of an omission, or even of hesitating counsels.

Whether the aristocracy wish for the people's happiness, or for their own peace and security, let them contend for parliamentary reformation! But if, on the contrary, they wish the people to be oppressed and persecuted into an Hibernian misery and madness, and themselves to live in perpetual dread of assassination, by preventing parliamentary reformation they may reasonably expect to have their wish. If Statesmen wish to make the country the abode of comfort and content, they will restore its freedom, and render its constitution once more an object of rational attachment: But if they are in the interest of the worst men in France, and would reduce our Islands to French Provinces, let them continue their enmity to freedom, and their treason to the constitution. The forming of some such association as hath been spoken of, should seem to have the strongest of recommendations: It could not make our situation worse, but, besides rescuing us from dangers the most terrific, it might even place us in a situation superior to any which this country at any time ever enjoyed. And, should the antient nobility

nobility and the virtuous gentry instantly take a position which so much becomes them, the awe it would impress on rash men, meditating farther violations of liberty, and new insults on public opinion, would at once, no doubt, have visible effects of the happiest nature and presage. May, then, the glorious effort be made !

Here, my dear Sir, should I close this letter, already I fear too long, did I not feel a most powerful impression on my mind, of the immense *practical* importance, at this crisis, of a certain principle in the science of representation, which has not yet, as I conceive, had its value duly appreciated, even by many sincere friends of human liberty. You perceive I speak of the *universality* of the right of election. But its intrinsic value might, methinks, have been conceived to exist, from observing the peculiar alarm which this principle, above all others, excited in the breasts of the *borough faction* about eight or nine years ago, and from the extraordinary pains they took to represent it as *dangerous*. THEY were right; for dangerous it was, and is, and ever will be, to such presumptuous usurpers. Although too many friends of Freedom are prejudiced against this universality of right, our borough faction have sagacity enough

to perceive its importance ; and they appear to believe that so long as this principle can be beaten down, they have nothing to fear ; for without the energetic operation of this principle, we never, as they think, can be strong enough to cope with them.

It will be recollected, that wherever this principle was absent, Parliamentary Reformers have proved a rope of sand ; but, where present, they have been knit together as one man. Hence the dread of most of the societies of 1792 ; and hence the absolute proscription, by name, of the London Corresponding Society in particular ! Those who acknowledge the doctrine of *universality*, are reformers on *principle* ; knowing, and indignantly feeling, that where the right is absent, there man is in the condition of a brute ; by which they are convinced, that the system is radically bad, and cannot possibly be beneficial to human society. They see, on the contrary, that nothing can be so beneficial to human society as the exercise of this right, because nothing can so raise its moral character.

Those, on the other hand, who, misled by pride, or prejudice, or self-interest, are capable of rejecting this principle, are utterly bewildered in their notions, without having on their
minds

minds any strong impresson of right or wrong ; and whether a line of separation between elector and non-elect^r shall be drawn at this point, or at that point, or at another point, it is in their minds a matter of cold expediency ; and it is of so little interest to mankind, as having no root in human nature, that it never can be possible for the friends of our liberties, on such sandy, slippery foundations, to raise up, unite, and hold together a sufficient number of men to make head against the consolidated power of those who hold us in chains.

That a *Man* has a right to vote in the choice of Legislators, *because he is a Man*, and not a beast, or a stone, is no maxim deduced by subtlety of reasoning, nor a truth which philosophy has fished up from the bottom of a well ; but it is a *principle*, intuitively seen and felt ; and as every human being is by nature formed to see and to feel, in respect of *himself*, the truth of this principle, so in this principle you have the means of interesting, in the cause of reform, every human being who is not bribed, or whose mind is not strangely perverted. Did any human being ever feel a conviction that *he ought to be a slave* ? Encompassed, as we are, by the powers of corruption and the sword, and witnessing the agonies of our expiring liberties, is there hence no *practical* good to be drawn by
wise

wise men? If, in this crisis of our fate, there be not, in the *practical* use of this single principle, an efficacy tenfold more powerful towards the recovery of our Constitution, than in ought else that can be adopted, I must needs think nature works in vain; but from nature having engraved this principle on the understanding, and stamped it on the heart of man, are we not assured that God intended it for *practical* utility?

Some friends of Liberty, however, say otherwise; and instead of admitting it to be useful, they, unfortunately agreeing with our worst adversaries, maintain it to be dangerous. Amongst these are men entitled to much consideration; 'tis only on this account their objections should seem entitled to serious answers; but, when these answers shall have been given, perhaps it will be seen, that those persons, instead of consulting original science, have only looked at the question through the medium of the existing system, which is a monstrous patch-work tiffue of contradiction, absurdity, injustice and mischief. The objections may be resolved into these two; namely,

1st. 'The universality of election would give
' to those who have no property, a power that
' would be dangerous to those who have prop-
' erty.'

2^{dly}.

2dly. 'The universality of election, by giving
' votes to the poor and necessitous, would pro-
' duce an universality of corruption, whereby
' all power would centre with those who were
' rich enough to buy the votes.'

One observation will, in fact, answer both these objections, as one of them gives all power to the *poor*, and as the other gives all power to the *wealthy*; so, like duellists, who in the same instant give each a mortal shot, they reciprocally put an end to each other, and so rid us in a moment of both.—But, out of respect to the objectors, over the corpse of each dead objection I will say a few words; first remarking, that both objections suppose the universality of suffrage *to be ingrafted upon our present monstrous elective system*, instead of our constituting a totally new system, simple, perspicuous, equitable and beneficent, according to the principles of representation and the spirit of our Constitution, in which universal suffrage should be *a mere feature*, not only beautiful, but beneficial in the highest degree.

With particular reference to the first objection, which warns us against danger from the *poor*, I would ask, is a vote once a year, or a musket all the year round, in a poor man's hand,
the

the most dangerous to the rich man's property? and do we not know that poor men may be so entrusted with muskets? The security is derived from *organization*. When the musket has its counterbalancing powers in a well-organized system, all is safe. I should be as ready as any man, to pronounce that Statesman mad, who should, without any one precaution, assemble what is called the rabble of London in Lincoln's-Inn Fields, give each man a musket and ammunition, and then dismiss the assembled multitude. I shall not, however, pass a sentence of insanity, either on *Alfred* who armed the whole English people, or on *Edward the First*, who caused every man to swear he would preserve the arms appointed him by law. These immortal Legislators knew how, by *organization*, to combine with the universality of arms the universality of liberty and peace.

And as mad as him who should arm the rabble, as I have supposed, should I deem any Statesman, who, without other alteration, should merely graft upon our present elective system, universal suffrage. And yet, seeing how the universality of arms was, by wise organization, interwoven into our Law and Constitution, will any one be so rash as to deny the *practicability* of so interweaving into the same web the universality

versality of suffrage? It is, however, an eternal truth, that free arms, and free voices, must for ever be the very woof and warp of the web of Freedom; for of no other materials under Heaven can it be woven.

If we are to look for mad Statesmen, we shall not have far to seek. When we see the wisdom of an ALFRED despised, and the craft of a JAMES THE SECOND adopted—when (with only some partial *factious* exceptions) we see the landholders and house-holders disarmed, and arms in the hands of an immense standing army of hirelings; shall we dream of danger to property from poor men *voting*, and not be awake to such a transcendant danger as this? And in this age of awful revolutions, will the English nobility rest satisfied with a military system, which in a single moment may annihilate their order, and give their estates to those hirelings, as the reward for going over to the standard of an Invader, who may come proclaiming Liberty and Equality; while, in their neglected books, and even in their unrepealed statutes, they have the military system of ALFRED, giving to themselves, to their estates, and to their country, infallible protection, with perfect freedom, and *without expence*? And again: In these days of political research, in which the lower ranks of people in

all

all the great towns, now in a state of misery and discontent beyond example, have *more constitutional knowledge than bread*, will the nobility and gentry rest satisfied with a corrupt system of civil government, to which the people, if not ideots, must be enemies? or, will they not think it more wise to procure to the government, by reform and by justice, the sincere friendship and warm attachment of all? for all must know, that *political liberty* is not only the best cure for all political grievances, but the only possible SECURITY against their return. In *organization*, I repeat it, lies the secret for preventing the possibility of danger from the *poor*; as I have elsewhere more at large demonstrated, and as the Duke of Richmond also has well explained.

And now, with regard to the second objection, by which we are told of danger from the *rich*; this, like its contrary, is an unsubstantial goblin, which, at the sight of *organization*, in like manner instantly vanishes. So fully have suitable provisions for this purpose been detailed by myself and others (amongst which provisions I hold the ballot in the highest estimation, because by very simple means it may be made unevadeable), that 'tis now unnecessary to add more than a few words.

According

According to my recollection, it has been remarked by Selden, that, with regard to high treason in this country, History shews, that at different periods it has had not only a different legal description, but the law against that crime has had a different object. In the first times, when, for the killing of a Saxon king, the homicide was fined a certain number of thrymsas, high treason was that only which aimed destruction at the *State* or *Constitution*; but from the period of the baneful influx of Norman despotism and Norman law at the Conquest, the Constitution was left to shift for itself, and was for a season annihilated. The only *State* or *Constitution* acknowledged by the law of despotism being the *person* and *will* of the despot, the despot's *person* becomes of course the sole object of protection to the laws against high treason. This change in the law of England accordingly took place at the Norman Conquest; and, notwithstanding the degree of ascendancy which the Saxon principles afterwards gradually recovered, and the degree in which the elective Saxon Constitution was in time restored to us; yet, from the sad æra of the Conquest to this day, the Crown has had interest enough, contrary to the clearest principles of civil government and to common sense,

to monopolize to itself ALL the protection afforded by the laws against high treason.

Having elsewhere proved, that although the king has an *executive* sovereignty, there is in parliament a *legislative* sovereignty, necessarily superior to that which is only *executive*; and again, in the People an *original absolute* sovereignty, of which the legislature itself is only a trustee, and the king only a magistrate; it necessarily follows, that the protection due to the magistrate is, to say the least, equally due to the whole of the legislature, and, in an especial and supereminent degree, to that branch of the legislature in which the PEOPLE, by their representative, are present, and perform the office of legislation: for, in the reality, and the purity and the perfection of that representative, consists the people's *liberty*, or, in other words, their *political existence*. He, therefore, who aims destruction at the political existence of a whole People, is infinitely more a traitor than he who only attempts the life of their chief magistrate.

So long as it is a maxim of our law, that the king never dies, no one but a madman will ever set about a change in the government, by killing a king; because another king, and another, *ad infinitum*, must succeed to mock the attempt; and

and whether the person on the throne shall die by natural, or by violent means, will have no influence on the state or constitution, as English history has abundantly shewn. It is only when the king's life, as in the case of ALFRED, is exposed to a *common danger with the liberties of the people*, in a war wherein both have a common interest and a common cause, that the people's *political existence*, which is the *sole* object of the CONSTITUTION, is likely to be endangered by the king losing his life; and that only inasmuch as on such an event may hinge the success of the war.

It must, I presume, be seen, that nothing in my argument goes to shew that the *life of the king* should not be guarded by the law as completely and as effectually as possible: But something more, I trust, will be seen, namely, that the *political existence* of the people is an object of protection of still higher importance; for all magistracies and all institutions are made only for the people, whose *political existence* is the very end and object of the constitution.

If I am founded in my reasoning, it will follow, that every act which violates the freedom of election, either as to the whole or any part of the people's representative, is of the very
nature

nature and essence of treason, and ought to be punished accordingly. I want not to see sanguinary executions follow the crime of which I am speaking; but he who has shewn himself a traitor to the liberties of his country, has doubtless forfeited his interest in the constitution, and ought at least to suffer a *civil* death, by a sentence of banishment, and a devolution of property to his heirs.

When, therefore, our elective system shall be framed on *the true principles of representation*, and shall be wisely *organized*; when it shall be improved by the introduction of a simple and *unevadeable ballot*, and its purity farther protected by the penalties of *high treason attaching on every one who violates its freedom or independence*; then shall we have nothing to fear at our elections even from the *rich*, and our liberties may endure to the end of time. Although at Athens there was no *representative sovereignty* for the purposes of legislation, as the laws were made by the assembled people themselves, yet so jealous were they of whatever *appertained* to their sovereignty, that they punished as high treason every improper interference in their elections of mere *magistrates*: How much more, then, ought all improper interference in the elections of *legislators* to be so punished!

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There is, indeed, a third objection, which I had nearly forgotten to notice. It is said, the poor are not competent to judge of laws and legislators. So said the Scribes and the Pharisees, the Chief Priests and the Rulers of old ; who rejected that law, which was received, and crucified that legislator, who was chosen, *by the poor*. But, it has since been the employment of learning and genius in all ages, to vindicate the discernment and wisdom shewn on that occasion by the poor, to the disgrace of their learned and proud opponents.

This objection to the competency of the poor, is not the fruit of due consideration or of candour. 'Tis not any individual poor man, to be met with by accident in the street, neither is it the poor *exclusively*, that are intended alone to elect a member of parliament ; but *the whole elective community*, consisting of the different classes and gradations, high and low, rich and poor, learned and illiterate. When, by the means touched on in these sheets, venality and bribing shall be cut up by the roots, the choice of fit legislators will then be an object of common interest to each elective body ; and if any competition should take place, it will not be, whether wisdom or stupidity, exalted virtue or the lowest profligacy, shall be the object of choice ;

choice ; but it will of course be for a preference amongst candidates, all of whom have knowledge, talents and merit.

In such elections, wherein we may presume there would be no sinister interest, and wherein mere *opinion* might therefore be expected to decide each man's vote, the poor and illiterate, if undecided in opinion, would, as naturally as the sparks fly upwards, listen to the counsel of the more learned and judicious. When a campaign is to be entered on, do the despisers of the poor object to the illiterate being soldiers and entrusted with *musquets*, on pretence of their not being competent to name the best General to command them ; or unqualified to judge of military science or military law ; or incapable of deciding on the justice or injustice of the war ? No : they make no such objections ; because it is familiar to every man's observation, that each individual soldier, illiterate as he may be, is so placed in the ranks, so taught his duty, and in other respects so circumstanced, as to be a useful member of the machine, and subservient to the plans of the presiding mind. As all this is the known effect of military *organization* ; so it is for civil legislation, so to *organize* our elective system, and consequently so to place, so to instruct, and so to circumstance each citizen

tizen of the lower class who is not blessed with science, nor can decide who amongst the candidates is most learned, that in exercising his *vote*, he shall benefit by the wisdom of the system, and necessarily act under the influence of superior knowledge and good example; and then the issue may be safely trusted, not only to his own interest, but to that principle in the human mind which always prefers right to wrong, unless when under a counteracting temptation. It is, however, a gross mistake to imagine that the poor do not generally know what gentlemen of their neighbourhood bear the best characters, and stand the highest for the reputation of talents and knowledge. And what more is wanting to direct their choice?

But when we recollect that the *poor* have the same *natural* faculties as ourselves, and have been entrusted by the great Creator and Legislator of the universe, with the means and management of their own self-preservation, physical and moral, and even with the means of their own eternal salvation, this denial of their competency to share in the election of *those who have full power over their property, their families, their lives and liberties*, appears to me to be both a satire on our species, and a libel on Providence. And from the lips of the advocates for
elections

elections as they are, the objection comes with a peculiarly ill grace ; for if, in our *elections as they are*, we shall on one hand cast an eye on many of our corporations, we shall find a majority of the electors precisely of that description of persons, *the poor and illiterate*—which the objection tells us are *not* competent to judge of laws and legislators ; and if, on the other hand, we turn to the close boroughs and to the partitioned counties, where wealth and accomplishments command the elections, we shall find them for the most part carried against the interests of liberty and the constitution ; so that, in our *elections as they are*, whether the influence be with the *poor* or with the *rich*, every thing is poisoned and perverted, and, for that very reason, is by too many objectors preferred. We must therefore confess, that such a system is so bad, it cannot be made worse ; and we shall be compelled also to acknowledge, that the very last thing we expect to hear of, is the choice of a man, because of his being particularly conversant with our constitution, or because he cares any thing about it. *Lawyers*, indeed, who hold *lucrative offices* under the *crown*, and are *on their road to higher preferments*, we see regularly returned for some of the close boroughs, either of the *treasury* or of its *dependents* ; but to talk of such men, when so bribed and so appointed, as fit

fit representatives of a free people, would be no mark of respect to any understanding.

Here, my dear Sir, I wish you to turn your thoughts to the nature of the English Constitution, to that representative which is its vital part, and to the true principles of representation: I wish you also to have present in your mind, that, as fast as we have increased our knowledge in the science of civil government, so fast have we seen our representation and our freedom melting away, till nothing of either remain but a shadow and a name: I wish you, moreover, to advert to the degraded and melancholy condition of our boroughs and most of our elective bodies, and to the practices almost universally prevalent in our elections; rendering it next to an impossibility for any man to get into parliament without transgressing some rule of law or morals, which must be kept secret to avoid shame; instead of being lifted up to that elevated station for virtues, and by means, the publicity of which would cover him with praise and honour. And I wish you, finally, to contemplate, on one hand, the necessary dependence and the poverty of the great mass of the community; and, on the other hand, the immense wealth of many individuals: Having, then, duly weighed all these considera-

tions, you will be able to judge, whether I require more than is necessary towards reforming our representative system, and preserving our liberties in future: And, having also reflected on the immensity of evil that must perpetually flow from corrupt elections, and from that parliamentary corruption which such elections must generate, you will be able to see, that infinitely more would be done towards a reformation of national morals by a complete and radical reformation of our elections, than can be done by any other human means.

On the present occasion, it may, perhaps, be superfluous to say more than I have said already, for vindicating the poor man's right to vote for representatives, or for shewing the wisdom, on the part of a patriotic association, of espousing and asserting that right; but the unspeakable importance, at this perilous time, of entertaining just notions, and adopting a right political conduct, appears to me such, that I shall rather hazard saying a few words too many, than being too concise.

Where rights of nature are concerned, I set no value on precedents; but those who in such cases think them of any weight, will find the statute of 7th Henry IV. c. 15, declaratory of the
very

very right in question. Should it be contended, that that statute could not have been intended to apply to the *villein*, whom the law then considered as *not free*; the answer is this,—villeinage in our day has no existence; nor will the law permit it to be said of any man (the insane, the criminal, and in some degree the infant excepted), that he is *not free*.

Many years, as I presume you know, have now elapsed, since I laboured to convince the possessors of property, that no danger to them could proceed from *allowing* the poor to vote, but that such danger might arise from *denying* them that right. I fear there will now be found in that argument, not only truth, but prophecy, as I conceive the danger is already arrived; and that, combined with another danger, it threatens not only our property, but our institutions. I have already touched on what may be apprehended, in the hour of trial, from a standing army of hirelings who are destitute of property. And when that hour shall come, must not the danger be increased tenfold, when we reflect on the state and temper of a half-famished populace, who, under what is insultingly called an English Constitution, are as miserable as bad government can make them? Will not these people throw that constitution in your face with contempt,

contempt, and flock by thousands and tens of thousands to an invader, for the mere chance of better things, or at the least for vengeance?

But are not the means of averting such a dreadful evil, and of doing away the very apprehension of it, simple and obvious? Address but the poor in the language of fellow-men and brethren,^r and render them justice; and from that moment you will have nothing to fear. Once made parties in our elections, and those elections reformed as they ought to be, it will be easy to make them understand, that, then having political liberty in full extent, no other government could possibly better their condition. Raised in their own estimation from enslaved subjects to free citizens, respect for themselves would make them respect the constitution of which they actually partook; and they would easily be taught patience, until the change in their political condition should ameliorate their condition in life, as assuredly it would, unless slavery and freedom be the same things. This argument receives illustration from the well-known fact, that becoming a member of a friendly society, with a free vote in its concerns, has in general a visible influence in improving the moral habits and raising the character of the poorest man. How, then, would their bo-

some

foins glow with an honest pride, on becoming voting members of a great and free nation! Thus, make but the whole of your populace free men; and in the same instant, you make their country and its constitution objects to them of pride and affectionate attachment, and a country for which they would at all times be ready to shed their blood. The invader, whom now but too probably they would receive with open arms as a friend and a deliverer, would then appear to them as an enemy and a destroyer. But, should they be left in their present degraded condition, and should misery, and resentment, and temptation, cause them to repair to an enemy's camp, I should not account it a very safe enterprize, to attempt to turn them, by haranguing them on an *English Constitution* or on *English Liberty*.

In creating our new elective system, if that happy day should ever arrive, we must copy him who created ourselves. For our existence, our right conduct, and our wellbeing, he has provided by a frame of body and mind adapted to all our purposes, high and low; in short, by *organization*. We have intellect, passions, affections, functions, and mere mechanical operations, amongst which there are those which

do not administer to our pride, although essential to the system. We have not a passion, an appetite, or a function which, if not counterbalanced, would not soon put an end to our existence; and some of them would be equally destructive to others; were it not that, in our *organization*, passion balances passion, reason holds the scales, and self-interest, coinciding with general interests, finally determines our actions; so that the design of Providence in our formation is fulfilled. Now, expunge but from our nature any one passion, or any one function, mischievous or disgusting as it may seem, and we shall no longer be what it has pleased God to make us, but a much worse thing. And so, in the great system of society, expunge, with sacrilegious hand, from the general liberty of mankind, the liberty of the poor, and at the same stroke you maim and emasculate human society, you debase and degrade the species, and you ignorantly do incalculable mischief!

If God have laid the foundations of human liberty, in the human intellect and the human heart, or, in other words, in the nature and constitution of man, independently of the accidents of fair or dark complexions, of higher or lower stature, of patrician or plebeian birth, of wealth or poverty, then must we not, in the constitution
of

of man himself, and not in these accidents, look for those foundations unless we think ourselves wiser than God? He must have a mind very singularly formed, who does not see, that, notwithstanding an earthen lamp constituted almost the whole extraneous property of an Epictetus, he had as proud a title to freedom, as had he whose wealth purchased of the Prætorians the Empire of Rome. But, if a certain measure of extraneous property shall alone confer political liberty, it does not appear that even a Jesus of Nazareth, were he now an Englishman, would be qualified to vote for a member of parliament.

If civil government be the science for conferring on mankind, through the indispensable medium of political liberty, social happiness, what must we think of those philosophers and statesmen, whose attainments in that science, and whose acquaintance with human nature, has taught them nothing better, than, in their wretched systems, to exclude from political liberty more than half the human species! For my own part, if *danger* to the possessor of property be a reason for denying to the poor man a *vote* at his parish church *once a year*, I must needs think the precaution,—a precaution which
only

only *irritates* instead of *disabling*—very absurd, and totally inadequate to the end in view; and that there would be more good sense in putting out the poor man's eyes, or maiming him by some other bodily mutilation, according to the antient practice of the East; where those whom coward fear pictured to the ever-jealous and tortured mind of despotism, as persons dangerous to its repose, were so treated.

Here, my dear Sir, I could make powerful appeals in support of the claim I vindicate on behalf of the labouring class, to the political economist, to the financier, to the naval or the military commander, to the statesman, to the philosopher, and to the divine; who must respectively know that class to be the very organs of productive industry, the creators of revenue private and public, the sinews of the state, the physical strength of society, the most active partners in the national company, carrying on the agriculture, the manufactures and the commerce of the country; and, in common with the highest and the proudest, brethren of the great family of mankind, and joint heirs of immortality; but I will content myself with appealing to any objector himself, as A MAN, and I will ask him, if it be on account of the trash in his purse, or of his reasoning and moral nature, that he founds his title to freedom,

and

and feels that he has the same right as other men to exercise the means of self-defence against injustice or oppression !

I will ask him also, if the power of *giving* a great additional value to the soil and to every raw material, by labour, ingenuity, knowledge, and skill, must not arise from intrinsic *property* in the giver ?

On this interesting subject, let us for a moment trace the workings of a mind like that of *Burns*. Knowing that the property of a cultivated field is of a mixed nature, being composed, first, of the owner's soil and seed, and the wear and tear of his implements ; and secondly, of the labour and skill of the workman ; this latter *property* he justly accounts the most valuable, being the soul to which all the rest is mere body. A *Burns*, then, is the cultivator of such a field for a worthless owner. The master, a qualified freeholder, passes the day at a modern election, there selling his vote to a West India Planter, in order to make the cruel lord of slaves a legislator of free men ; and to strengthen the faction of a minister, while trampling on the Constitution of his country, and deluging the world with human blood in the cause of despotism ; and this elector then

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spends

spends the remaining hours in feasting and intemperance, and in disseminating the worst poison of society, profligate sentiments, tending to debase our species for the aggrandisement of bad men.

The ploughman, mean while, pursues his accustomed occupation during the hours of labour, and then, reposing under some friendly shade to moralise on man and his means of happiness, he rapturously hymns the praises of the Creator in the song of Liberty: but, retiring to his cottage with slow and meditating step, his gushing tears eloquently speak his wounded mind—"ALAS! BUT FREEDOM IS NOT MINE!"

At length, however, by unremitting toil and parsimony, he becomes, through purchase, the possessor of a freehold, dedicating his periodical vote to the cause only of his country's liberty. But obnoxious to the malice and the conspiring wickedness of his quondam master, this monster, by a false title, by bribery, and the chicanery of the law, robs him of his land, reducing him once more to day-labour for his subsistence.

Another election occurs in his county town. He now can thitherward cast only a tear-dimmed

dimmed eye, and the emotions of an exalted soul ; while his low-minded implacable enemy passes him with a leer of triumph, and an insolent scorn, once more, unreprieved by the presence of integrity, to vote away that public freedom which the honest ploughman would have died to preserve. What a tempest of indignation must such a moment raise in the impassioned soul of a *Burns* ! “ Regardless,” says he, “ as I am, while possessed of an independent mind, and of a toil-hardened body, of being despoiled of my freehold ; even proof as I am against this wretch’s scorn, this, this is too much ! What ! sufficeth it not, that injury and misfortune await me ? but must the triumph of a villain necessarily bring in its train a legal degradation from the rank of freemen ! Accursed be such law ! Despicable the mind that first conceived it ! And more despicable those who endure its folly, or submit to its injustice !” If such language, from such a man, and on such an occasion, be not too strong, we ought to recollect, that between the higher and lower classes of society, it does not appear that nature, in the distribution of her mental gifts, shews any partiality ; and that, how inferior in general the lower classes may be, in culture of mind and polish of speech, they are *reasoning beings*, abounding with strong minds
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and sharpened faculties ; and, though not furnishing many poets, they abound with orators.

To conclude : Considering all we have to fear from a potent faction, who have in their hands the purse and the sword, the civil and the judicial powers of the state, and an immense preponderancy in the legislature ; and considering likewise what we have to apprehend from a confederacy against us of almost all Europe, with the wonder of the age at its head ; while a great majority of the nation must, it is but too probable, be alienated from the Constitution, and disgusted at the government and at the higher orders in society ; I humbly ask, if the means of our salvation be not those which are here pointed out ? And if not, then what are they, and where are they to be found ?

With the greatest regard and esteem,

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours most faithfully,

J. C.

POSTSCRIPT, April 3.

Rumour gives us to understand, that parliamentary opposition to ministers is acquiring more union, more strength, and more energy
of

of action. 'Tis indeed high time it did ; but still, until all persons, conscious of having undue influence over the elections, either in our boroughs, our cities, or our counties, shall be prevailed on, or compelled, to sacrifice to the public good all those corrupt interests, and our whole elective system shall be new-modelled on the true principles of representation, the formation of such a society as hath been proposed will still be as necessary as ever ; and should indeed seem to be the only measure that can give efficacy to such a reported union of patriotic men, or satisfaction to an abused nation.

Our disease—it cannot be too often repeated, is, THE LOSS OF POLITICAL LIBERTY, or, in other words, THE WANT OF CONSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION ; whereas, our other calamities,—war, taxes, arbitrary imprisonment, military government, torture, and a Tory Ministry, which is the *immediate* cause of these several curses, are all of them mere *symptoms* of this disease ; and on its cure will be seen no more, although scars may be left behind.

Parliamentary opposition, therefore, to do any solid good, must extend its union to the PEOPLE, and have for its support an enlightened

PUBLIC OPINION, and an energetic PUBLIC VOICE; unless opposition shall direct its main effort for securing the people's object, it cannot, in my judgment, indeed it ought not, to have the people's support.

Should opposition do no more *now*, than it did the last time the nation was nearly ruined by war, what will be the extent of our obligation to it? It will obtain us a mere *temporary cessation* of a national scourge; for as war is the harvest of corruption, and the grand engine of despotism, as soon as the nation shall have recovered the ability of feeding war, war will infallibly return. I have seen a satire, describing a certain herd of swine, in the hands of keepers who live upon their blood, and who of course do not bleed them at any one time quite to death, but only till they faint. The bleeders then stop their hand, and permit the swine to run loose again amongst the acorns, until sufficiently recovered for another bleeding; but, as the blood of their swine is their favourite repast, no longer respite is allowed, and the bleeding is immediately repeated; and so on alternately, *ad infinitum*. If, indeed, we be not a nation of swine instead of men, we shall determine on having a *security* from similar treatment!

N.B.

N. B. By the words "Association," and "Society" in this letter, the writer only means such an union, for communication of opinions and co-operations of actions, as may be for the public good ; but still that no individual is to be implicated in any act to which he is not himself a party.

NOTE on the suggestion in p. 44, for punishing the violation of the freedom of election, as *High Treason*.

The Writer is aware of the attacks which, from one description of men, probably *may*, and, from another description of men, doubtless *will*, be made upon this suggestion. "What!" says the flippant half-thinker, "is it to be *High Treason* to give a pot of porter to a voter at an election? 'Tis too ridiculous to be thought of!" Then comes the deeper disciple and child of corruption: "But here is no gradation of crime and punishment. Such a system can never receive a parliamentary sanction ; it contradicts all the principles of legislation, thus to confound great and small crimes, and to consider them as the same."

The answers are short and plain.

1st, If giving *a pot of porter* were to be an overt act, by which a proof of *High Treason* could at this day be substantiated against any man, he would of course be hanged, drawn and quartered. And, 2^{dly}, In the contemplation of law, *High Treason* has no *degrees* ; so that, whether *the overt act*, by which the treasonable intention is made manifest, be the giving a pot of porter, or making war upon the king within
the

realm
 the ~~nation~~ at the head of an army, the crime is the same, and so is the punishment.

The sole question, therefore, is, whether any overt act, great or small, which manifests *a treasonable attack upon the sovereignty*, or, in other words, the *political existence* of the people, ought or ought not to be punished as High Treason? For the reasons he has assigned, the writer thinks it ought to be so punished; and he trusts that the conviction of every intelligent and virtuous mind, duly impressed with a sense of the deluge of iniquity, and the infinity of ill consequences flowing from the poisoned fountain of corrupt election, will be the same as his own.

Let not, however, the unwary be ensnared to his destruction. Let the crime be accurately defined, and the law be so promulgated, and with such frequent repetitions, that none can be ignorant. Then, whether a man's treason were merely against the *king*, whose counsels influenced by ill advice, and whose power delegated to wicked ministers, may have brought upon the nation the heaviest calamities; or against the *Constitution* in its most vital organ, a Constitution which, if adhered to, would make calamity a stranger in the land, and under whose shadowing wings no man could suffer oppression; is it not fit that the traitor should receive his reward!

